D 517
.C534
Copy 1

The World's Debt to Great Britain

ADDRESS OF

SAMUEL HARDEN CHURCH,

On Britain's Day

The World's Debt to Great Britain

ADDRESS OF

SAMUEL HARDEN CHURCH,

On Britain's Day

AT THE PITTSBURGH EXPOSITION,

SATURDAY EVENING,

DECEMBER 7, 1918

QA
517
.C534

By Transfer
JUN 8 1919

What is this thing—this glorious thing—that you call the British Empire? What is it that gives England, which is the heart of this British Empire,—or, as we might call her in our modern phrase, the British Commonwealth of Free Nations—what is it that gives her the spirit of eternal youth, her unconquerable strength, her power to adapt herself to the progressive needs of human society in every age? When we survey her history we think of her as Shakespeare said of Cleopatra, "Age cannot wither nor custom stale her infinite variety."

The world is grateful to Great Britain for the qualities of her national character. England's chivalry, her love of sports, her sense of fair play, her sacred regard for womanhood, her tender care of children, her love of justice, her preservation of the rights of property and of the landmarks of her neighbors—all these things are characteristic of the nation as they are of the citizens who compose the nation, and wherever the people of Great Britain may go to found new homes they carry these qualities with them to make a better citizenship and a richer humanity throughout the world.

Another thing we are grateful for is the high quality of imagination which has given to English literature a charm and power and influence which is unequalled by anything that has ever been produced in the literature of ancient or modern times. And England has only to take that mighty army of immortals, with Shakespeare at their head, including Chaucer, Byron and Tennyson; her historians, Macaulay and Freeman and Gardiner; her scientists like Huxley and Darwin and Spencer; her orators, like Burke and Pitt and Sheridan—she has only to take these men and compare them with the best men whom Germany has ever produced in order to demonstrate that the highest intellectual culture which the world possesses, or has ever possessed, is not Germanic but is purely British.

And then, more than all, we are grateful because Great Britain went into this war. She was not prepared for it and the gallant band of heroes whom the Kaiser described as "a con-

temptible little army," were strong enough to hold back the mighty onrush of German savages until the startled world could organize its powers into an effective resistance.

In this hour of triumph I want to congratulate you upon the possession of a great Prime Minister—one of the ablest men that this conflict has produced. You will remember that last Spring, in the dark hours of Germany's final offensive, when Mr. Lloyd George was defending himself against the extraordinary attack of General Maurice, an attack which seemed to base itself upon the policy of the British Government in keeping troops in Mesopotamia and Egypt, which General Maurice seemed to think should be employed in France, the Premier based his eloquent defense upon a classical precedent:—"There was a great empire," he said, which withdrew its legions from the outlying provinces of the empire to defend its heart against the Goths, and those legions never went back." Mr. Lloyd George referred to the Roman Empire, and this is what happened. When the barbarous Germans who inhabited the forests stretching across Europe to the north of Italy—not nearly so barbarous, nor nearly so savage as the German armies of our own times—when these barbarous hordes undertook to destroy the best civilization of their day, as their successors have undertaken to destroy the best civilization of our day, Rome drew in her armies from Spain, France, Mesopotamia and Britain. As Mr. Lloyd George says, those armies never went back. The occurrence marked the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and your Prime Minister was great enough to place the vision which came to him through his historic knowledge against the technical judgment of those great soldiers of the general staff, and the end showed that the Prime Minister was right and the soldiers were wrong, when the conquest of Mesopotamia and Palestine forced the surrender of Turkey and Bulgaria and caused Austria to throw up her hands and cry for peace.

But what is the particular service which England has done in the world which justified her in defending her

Empire today against the barbarian hordes of Germany? I am going to try to answer that. Two huge institutions have existed in Europe through many centuries and down to this present moment which have enormously oppressed mankind and restricted human progress. These institutions are feudalism in the state and feudalism in the church. Please remember that I am not attacking anybody or anything. I am stating historic facts. In Russia you see at their worst the wicked fruits of these twin evils—a mighty nation standing in the sunlight of liberty but unable to see the wonderful beauty of life because their former masters have blinded their eyes with darkness. And what is England's record? Why is she called the Mother of Parliaments? Why is it that the Morning Star of the Reformation rose in dazzling brilliance and audacity in England a hundred years before it became visible in any other sky? It is because all the political and religious liberty which the world enjoys today have had their birth in that island. That is why some people hate her so much. And when, seven hundred years ago, an arrogant English sovereign, King John, persisted in over-riding the liberties of his people, they wrested from him Magna Charta —the Mighty Charter—which has been the basis of civil liberty throughout England and America from that day to this. Right here, we see the meaning of English liberty by contrast, for when, in the time of King John, the Barons federated with the people for liberty against the King, in our time the German Barons federated with the Kaiser for autocracy against the people. It was a hard struggle, this fight for civil and religious liberty in England. They adopted thirty statutes after King John's time trying to preserve and defend it, but it was not until Oliver Cromwell came up from his farm at Huntingdon and made himself the master spirit of the British people that, once for all, autocracy in state and church was crushed throughout the British dominions forever.

Let me show you a contrast between a civilized and humane nation, and a nation which Goethe characterized as

"ferocious brutes." You have seen that picture in Punch where the British lion stands on a mound emitting a roar which only a lion can emit, a roar which comes from the depths of his nature, and from every quarter of the globe his cubs respond—Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, Egypt. Why do they do that? How was it with Germany? When the first blast of war blew on our ears, when Germany had been ruling those French provinces for half a century, fifty thousand of the men of Alsace and Lorraine gave up home and property and fled across the border to range themselves under the only flag their hearts could ever recognize, the ancient oriflamme of France. Not a man who could escape the impressment would fight for Germany. Let us not forget to praise France, in Shakespeare's phrase, as true today as when it was uttered in the play of King John: "France, whose armor conscience buckled on, whom zeal and charity brought into the field, as God's own soldier." And take England once more. She had conquered South Africa and given the Boers a complete liberty and self-government of which they had never dreamed in the days of their own tyrant, Paul Kruger. But here was their chance to revolt. Did they take it? When they saw peril approaching that precious heritage of human government which has been expanding itself throughout the world from the day when the Mighty Charter was established on British soil at Runnymede, the last Boer turned from his farm and his mine and joined the fight for liberty under the British flag. Wherever the German armies have entered a foreign city during this war why is it that the people have wailed and gnashed their teeth? And when the British armies have captured the citadels of their enemies, as at Bagdad and Jerusalem and Damascus, why is it that the people have greeted them with shouts of welcome and rejoicing? It is because in one case you have an army of murderers and in the other an army of chivalrous soldiers. Do you want further proof? The official reports show that Germany has sunk 5,000 British merchant ships with the

loss of 15,000 men, women and children—all murdered at sea without a chance for their lives. The British on their part sunk 500 German ships without the loss of a single life. While the German was trying to sink without a trace everything that floated upon the high seas John Bull never fired a shot until he had first made provision for the safety of passengers and crews.

While the people of the world were gaining a larger knowledge of the causes of this war, do you remember that phrase that the Germans and the pro-Germans—and let us never forget that the anti-British are always secretly pro-German—used to throw at us on every occasion? "What is the difference," they would ask, "between German militarism and British navalism?" The question was a very adroit one and for a long time during the period of America's supine neutrality it served its purpose in befogging the issue. But the answer is a very easy one. The difference between German militarism and British navalism is a state of mind. German militarism had for its purpose the destruction of human liberty while British navalism had for its purpose the defense of civilization. "World power or downfall" was the battle cry with which Germany set out to conquer the unsuspecting world, and the answer is a tragic downfall more complete and irremediable than has ever occurred in the history of mankind. The words of the ancient prophet Obadiah against autocracy and oppression stand in every age: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee. Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord." We are approaching the final settlements of this tragedy, and the voices of the slaughtered dead cry out to us from their graves that the men who plotted this infamous murder and destruction shall be individually punished before an outraged world.

And what of America's part in this awful conflict? I remember one day on our visit to Windsor Castle that while we were looking around those stately gardens I said to our friendly guide: "Is not that vine on the wall a

Virginia creeper?" "Yes," he said, and then seeming to catch the symbolism that was in my mind he pointed to the top of the ancient tower, over which the great standard of England was floating, and said to me, "That flag, the flag of the British Empire, is held aloft on a staff of Oregon pine." I have a confident faith that John Bull and Uncle Sam have clasped hands now in a friendship that will never be broken, and with those two worthy gentlemen standing together the peace and civilization of the world ought to be safe.

We in America must never forget that, while we were making our own too tardy preparation, the power which has held back the devastating armies of Germany from invading the American coast and transforming our beautiful and prosperous land into a desert waste, as they have done in Belgium and France, the power which has protected our women from dishonor and our children from slaughter, the power which has prevented that awful catastrophe from coming into the home and heart of every American is the indomitable power of the British navy. And if I rightly understand the public opinion of this country, any proposal that may be made in the Peace Conference to limit the power of the British Navy, or to substitute for Great Britain's humane conception of the freedom of the seas that system of piracy and murder which interprets Germany's conception of the freedom of the seas, will meet with the condemnation of the people of America. It has taken England's giant daughter a long time perhaps to find her soul—the period of inaction made it seem a long time to some of us—but when America at last realized that liberty and civilization were actually suffering a progressive and rapid destruction at the hands of Germany, her heart turned with loyalty to the succor of the world and the rescue of its people; and she came forward with a full stride and took her place on the battle front and unwaveringly fed the precious lives of her sons into that furnace of Hell and death, in order that righteousness and peace and justice and the law might be redeemed.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 021 546 506 8